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**RENNER'S
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TODAY'S VERSE

2 Corinthians 5:6,7 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: For we walk by faith, not by sight



Faces of Hamilton County

People who call our community their own

What makes Natalie Piggush smile? "Making other people laugh," said the 27-year-old Fishers resident. Born in Indianapolis, she was raised in Fishers and graduated in 2014 from Guerin Catholic High School in Noblesville and in 2018 from Purdue University with a degree in public relations. She is a senior account manager and internship coordinator for Dittoe Public Relations in Broad Ripple, working there since graduation. She was found rehearsing for Carmel Community Players' next production, "Moon Over Buffalo," a comedy that ends this weekend, with shows at 7:30 p.m. today and 2:30 p.m. Sunday at The Cat in Carmel. "Can't wait for audiences to come out and see this hilarious show. There's so much chaos and physical comedy and costume changes and so much more ... You'll laugh out loud, I can guarantee it." She said, "I play Rosalind, the daughter of famed former Broadway stars Charlotte and George Hay - she's come back to show off her new fiance who she loves (or does she?) and has sworn off theater forever (or has she?)," said Natalie, a newlywed herself. "Yes, I'm a newlywed. After nearly six years of dating, my husband, Nate, and I got married this July at Holy Spirit at Geist followed by a beautiful reception at Daniel's Vineyard. It was the happiest, best, most wonderful day of our lives! We will remember it forever." "My first time on stage - and the first time I knew this is what I loved to do -- was in seventh grade as the Master of Ceremonies for our grade's production of 'Sesame Street the Musical.'" She said, "I got to engage with the crowd of parents and younger kids, make the audience laugh and even tried my hand at a little improv. I was hooked." She thanks Nate for running lines with her and keeping the house in order as she runs off to rehearsal every night. She's also done improv comedy for many years as well (shoutout to her former troupe at Purdue, The Crazy Monkeys). She and Nate consider themselves "foodies." She said, "We love trying out new restaurants throughout the city. We love The Nesst in Noblesville, but we also make tacos together at least once a week at home."

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Boomer Bits



Ask Rusty – I'm 65 and Working; Can I Collect Ex-spouse Benefits?



ASK Rusty

Social Security Matters

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Dear Rusty: I turned 65 earlier this year, and I still work full time. I was divorced four years ago after 38 years of marriage, but my ex-husband has been collecting Social Security for at least 10 years now. Can I start collecting Social Security and still work full time? And can I collect my ex-husband's amount if it is more than mine (and what is the best way to achieve this)? When I went to my local SSA office, they said they had no way of knowing that. Signed: Working Divorcee

Dear Working Divorcee: Although you are eligible to claim Social Security at age 65, because you are working full time you may wish to wait a bit longer to do so. That's because Social Security has an "earnings test" which applies to anyone who collects benefits before full retirement age, and you have not yet reached yours. The earnings test imposes a limit on how much you can earn before SS takes away some of your benefits. If you exceed the annual earnings limit (\$22,320 for 2024), Social Security will want back \$1 in benefits for every \$2

you are over the limit and you will need to repay that, usually by having future benefits withheld. If you significantly exceed the limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to receive SS benefits until you either earn less or reach your full retirement age (FRA) of 66 years and 8 months. So, if your earnings from working will significantly exceed the annual earnings limit (which changes yearly), it's likely that your wisest move would be to wait longer to claim your Social Security. As a bonus for doing so, your monthly payment will have grown and will be higher when you claim later. The earnings test no longer applies after you reach FRA. Regarding benefits from your ex-husband, you cannot collect his instead of yours. What you may be able to do, when you claim your own benefit, is to get an additional amount which brings your monthly payment up to 50% of his. In order for that to happen, you would need to satisfy the following criteria:

- You are not currently married.

➔ See RUSTY Page A4

Six Steps to Avoid Package Theft

The Better Business Bureau reminds us that the rise of online marketplaces and expedited delivery services is convenient for many consumers nationwide, allowing shoppers to search for the perfect gift for friends and family. Unfortunately, purchasing and having the item delivered to the proper address does not guarantee you will receive it. According to a Security.org study, approximately 79 percent of consumers experienced package theft in 2022. Package thieves, also known as "porch pirates," often take advantage of an opportunity and may frequent a neighborhood or community multiple times before moving on to another. They will often target houses that provide a quick in-and-out route, especially if the porch or area where packages are delivered is within 25 feet of the street and is easily visible. As a crime of opportunity, preventing or discouraging package theft can be accomplished in several ways, depending on the location of your residence, type, and community. For instance, preventing package theft at an apartment complex in the middle of the city differs from a suburban residential community. However, consumers can use specific strategies to discourage the act no matter where they live. **BBB provides the following tips to prevent package thieves from affecting your plans:**

Check with neighbors. Sometimes, your package may not be stolen simply at the wrong address. Before filing a report or contacting the sender,

➔ See THEFT Page A4

How to Safely Dispose of Used Medical Sharps During Holiday Travel

It doesn't matter if you are traveling by plane, train, car or staying home this holiday season, it's important to know how to safely dispose of used medical sharps. Millions of people in the United States use needles, lancets

and syringes – otherwise known as sharps – to puncture the skin and dispense medication to help manage short- or long-term chronic conditions like diabetes, arthritis, cancer or autoimmune diseases.

For both existing sharps users and people using sharps for the first time, disposal can be confusing, especially while traveling. An easy-to-use online tool can help sharps users navigate safe

➔ See SHARPS Page A4

TODAY'S HEALTH TIP

When foods carry healthy labels like "low sugar," we often eat more of them and end up eating more calories.

Today's health tip was brought to you by Dr. John Roberts. Be sure to catch his column each week in The Times and online at www.thetimes24-7.com



OBITUARIES

None

The Times appreciates all our customers. Today, we'd like to personally thank **JOHN CRONE** for subscribing!



TODAY'S QUOTE

"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful."
Norman Vincent Peale

TODAY'S JOKE

What did one Christmas tree say to the other Christmas tree?
"I wish Christmas would last forever because there would be no Sep-timber!"



Photo courtesy of Sarah Ackermann

Sarah Ackermann of Noblesville will sign copies of her book on Saturday at Logan Village Mall.

Children's Book Author An Inspiration to All Ages



BETSY REASON
Columnist

Want to GO?

What: Meet Noblesville author Sarah Ackermann, who is celebrating her children's book, "Finding My Superpower" at a book signing. She will have books for purchase.

When: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. today (Saturday).

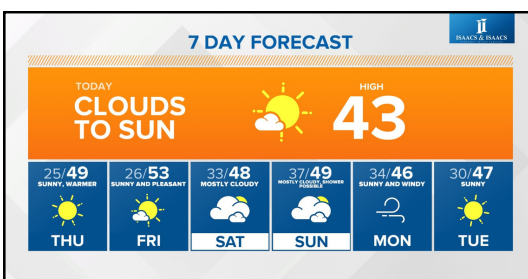
Where: Logan Village Mall, 977 Logan St., Noblesville.

What else: Prizes, a super selfie station and coloring page station.

What's next: Ackerman at 5 p.m. Jan. 28 will partner with Kiln Creations in downtown Noblesville to do a special book-reading and art project, with a chance to win a copy of the book. Reservations required.

Sarah Ackermann's smile says it all. The 40-year-old Noblesville woman who wrote a children's book "to inspire little superheroes for years to come" is an inspiration herself. She'll sign copies of her book, "Finding My Superpower" from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. today at Logan Village Mall in downtown Noblesville. She wrote the book, published by Orange Hat Publishing, to inspire kids. But she actually inspires all ages. Ackermann suffered a "minor" stroke in her 30s and since recovering, learned to not take life too seriously," she said. "And to enjoy the little things as much as possible." Ackermann is getting better at living in the moment. She started out as an art teacher and has taught all levels, from kindergarten to adult. "It was always a goal of mine to author and illustrate a children's book, and one day I said to myself, 'I better do this now.'" Just prior to brainstorming the book, she had been teaching young students in Zurich, Switzerland,

➔ See BETSY Page A6



Past and Future Bring History to Life at Coxhall Gardens

Hamilton County Parks and Recreation, in collaboration with Eidolon LLC, has introduced a state-of-the-art interpretive resource that will provide visitors to Coxhall Gardens the opportunity to travel back in time to "meet" John Williams, the Hamilton County pioneer who constructed the Historic Williams House that is located in the park.

Through the use of the cutting-edge technology of augmented reality (AR), the program allows visitors to download an app to view a digitally animated likeness of Mr. Williams on their smart phone screens, as he provides details about himself, his family and the home he built in 1865. Explains Eidolon founder and app developer, Jordan Clevenger, "Overlaying the digital content of John Williams' image onto the real-world landscape, heightens viewers' perceptions and personalizes the interpretive experience." Because the historic structure is undergoing renovation, making its interior inaccessible to the public for months, this innovative approach to interpretation has become all the more necessary. "We want to continue to share key details about the Williams family and their historic significance to Hamilton County with interested visitors, even during the construction that will prevent access to the residence. This unique interpretive approach allows us the ability to make that information continuously available to the public during all park hours," states Christy Brocken, Historic Resource Specialist for Hamilton County Parks.



Christy Brocken, Historic Resource Specialist for Hamilton County Parks and Recreation (behind sign), and Jordan Clevenger (second from right) provide augmented reality program instructions to guests attending the Preserving History event held at Coxhall Gardens' and the Historic Williams House.

The AR program will remain operational indefinitely at the site and will augment content presented by parks staff and docents once the historic residence's renovation is completed and tours of the house interior commence. Both Brocken and Clevenger envision this cutting-edge technology being used in similar applications where historians wish to convey information and material in a novel and memorable fashion.

To learn more about the Historic Williams House and Coxhall Gardens, visit MyHamiltonCountyParks.com or call 317-774-2574. For details about this remarkable augmented reality project, visit eidolonllc.net or contact Jordan Clevenger at jordanclevenger@eidolonllc.net.



The Williams House exhibits Italianate architectural details and is one of the few remaining examples of homes constructed in that style in Hamilton County. Renovation of the structure by Hamilton County Parks and Recreation, with support from the Friends of Hamilton County Parks, Inc., Foundation, is now under way.



Members of the Williams family pose in front of the residence, circa 1890.

Spartz Appointments

This month, Rep. Victoria Spartz, R-Ind., announced the high school seniors across Indiana's Fifth District who have been nominated to attend the United States Military Academies. These academies allow young people to serve our country while receiving full scholarships from some of our world class institutions of higher learning.

"It is a privilege to nominate these extraordinary students," said Rep. Spartz. "This year's applicants represented our district's best and brightest to be considered for these prestigious positions."

Academy at West Point:

John Afari-Akins – Culver Academies
Reed Alexander – Hamilton Southeastern High School
Joseph Del Busto – Carmel High School
Chloe De Leon – Carmel High School
Maxwell Johns – Noblesville High School
Luke Mawbey – Western High School
Dominic Moringiello – Guerin Catholic School
Paul Shetty – Cathedral High School
Marcus Sherrod – Brebeuf High School / Morehouse College
Harold Williams, III – Hamilton Southeastern High School

Air Force Academy:

Chloe De Leon – Carmel High School
Layton Dolvin – Heritage Christian School

Tillman Etchison – Hamilton Heights High School
Christine Hu – Carmel High School
Maxwell Johns – Noblesville High School
Spencer Luhrs – Carmel High School
Luke Mawbey – Western High School
Caleb Myers – Fishers High School
Jackson Nevil – Tipton High School
Jack Roby – Fishers High School
Paul Shetty – Cathedral High School
Conner Winchester – Cowan High School

Merchant Marine Academy:

Tillman Etchison – Hamilton Heights High School
Luke Osborne – Home-Schooled
Caleb Ritter – Fishers High School
Wyatt Wade – Noblesville High School

Naval Academy:

John Afari-Akins – Culver Academies
Chloe De Leon – Carmel High School
Tillman Etchison – Hamilton Heights High School
Sean Halvorsen – Noblesville High School
Christine Hu – Carmel High School
Maxwell Johns – Noblesville High School
Daniel Leatherwood – Highlands Latin School
Luke Mawbey – Western High School
Jackson Nevil – Tipton High School
Luke Osborne – Home-Schooled
Paul Shetty – Cathedral High School

No Surprise – House Prices Up Here

There's some good news for home sellers in Noblesville and Hamilton County, according to the folks at FC Tucker Real Estate. In both Hamilton County and Noblesville, the average home sale price continued to increase. And even though pended home sales were down across the county, Noblesville homes sold faster than at the same time last year. According to F.C. Tucker Company, specifically:

In Hamilton County:

- The year-to-date home sale price increased 8.1 percent to \$514,355, the highest average sale price of any county in the 16-county central Indiana area.

- Available housing inventory decreased 5.2 percent compared to November 2022.
 - Pended housing sales were down 14 percent compared to this time last year.
- In Noblesville:
- The average home sale price increased, up 7.3 percent to \$439,120 compared to this time last year.
 - Closed home sales were down 20 percent compared to this time last year.
 - Noblesville homes sold 8 days, or 22.2 percent, faster compared to November 2022.

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Purdue football reaches mountain top in 2000s



KENNY THOMPSON Columnist

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part 9 of a series celebrating 100 seasons of Purdue football at Ross-Ade Stadium.

Joe Tiller's turnaround of the Purdue football program reached its zenith in 2000 with a Big Ten Conference tri-championship and the school's second Rose Bowl berth. Two other Tiller teams came close to reaching the Big Ten mountain top again but cruel fate at Ohio State in 2003 and Kyle Orton's injury in 2004 proved too much to overcome. By the end of the decade, Tiller was retired and the Boilermakers went into yet another decline with athletic director Morgan Burke's second coach-in-waiting hire, Danny Hope, not coming close to Matt Painter's success in men's basketball.

Best Ross-Ade games of the 2000s

Oct. 7, 2000: Purdue 32, No. 6 Michigan 31 – Given a second chance by the Boilermaker defense, Travis Dorsch atoned for an earlier miss by kicking a 33-yard field goal with four seconds left.

Purdue overcame a 28-10 halftime deficit by amassing 530 total yards, the most allowed by Michigan in school history. Touchdown runs by Steve Ennis and Montrell Lowe brought the Boilermakers within 28-23 going into the fourth quarter. Drew Brees brought Purdue within 31-29 with 6:45 to play on a 10-yard touchdown pass to John Standeford.

Brees became Purdue's career passing leader, surpassing Mark Herrmann to become the first Boilermaker to throw for more than 10,000 yards.

Oct. 28, 2000: No. 16 Purdue 31, No. 12 Ohio State 27 – Dorsch wasn't the only Boilermaker to make the most of a second chance. Brees had thrown a seemingly backbreaking interception in the fourth quarter that set up the go-ahead touchdown for the Buckeyes. Told by teammate Ike Moore on the sideline "if you break it, then fix it," Brees threw a 64-yard touchdown pass to a wide open Seth Morales with 1:55 remaining.

Nov. 18, 2000: No. 17 Purdue 41, Indiana 13 – The Boilermakers earned a Rose Bowl berth for the first time in 34 years, easily wrapping up a share of the Big Ten championship. Montrell Lowe rushed 38 times for 208 yards and four touchdowns. Brees rushed for a touchdown and tossed a 13-yard TD to Tim Stratton.

Nov. 22, 2008: Purdue 62, Indiana 10 – "I can now ride off into the sunset and feel like the job is done." Those were among Joe

Tiller's final words to Purdue fans, who watched the winningest coach in school history (87-62) go out with the largest margin of victory in Ross-Ade Stadium history. The Boilermakers scored on their first 10 possessions, with Curtis Painer throwing for 448 yards and five touchdowns. Kory Sheets scored three times to set the Purdue single-season rushing TD record with 16.

Oct. 17, 2009: Purdue 26, No. 7 Ohio State 18 – The Buckeyes were denied a chance to tie the Big Ten record of 17 consecutive road victories by a Boilermaker team that was 1-5 coming into the game. All-American defensive end Ryan Kerrigan sacked Terrelle Pryor three times and forced him to fumble twice. Joey Elliott threw two touchdowns passes to Aaron Valentin, and Carson Wigs kicked four field goals. Fans rushed the field and a few picked up souvenirs from head coach Danny Hope: his Purdue hat, whistle and a black raincoat.

Top players of 2000s Ross-Ade

Tim Stratton – The first winner of the John Mackey Award given to the nation's best tight end, Stratton caught 204 passes for 2,088 yards and 15 touchdowns in his career. Stratton was a three-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, joining Bob Hadrick (1963-65), Chuck Kyle (1966-68) and Rod Woodson (1984-86) as the only Boilermakers to accomplish the feat.

Travis Dorsch – The 2001 Ray Guy Award winner as the nation's outstanding punter, Dorsch earned All-America honors as a kicker as well. He was the first player in Big Ten history to earn first-team all-conference honors as both a punter and a kicker.

Stuart Schweigert – After winning Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors in 2000, Schweigert went on to set Purdue's career interception record with 17. The safety was a first-team All-Big Ten selection in 2001 and 2003.

John Standeford – The Monrovia native left Purdue as the Big Ten career leader with 266 receptions and 3,788 receiving yards.

Taylor Stubblefield – Departed Purdue as the NCAA record holder with 316 receptions and a consensus All-American in 2004. Stubblefield's career 3,629 receiving yards fell just shy of teammate John Standeford's school record. He did set a school record with 16 receiving touchdowns as a senior.

Kyle Orton – The only Purdue quarterback to start four consecutive bowl games, Orton passed for 8,918 yards and 61 touchdowns. Orton went on to play for Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, Dallas and Buffalo from 2005-2014. He passed for 18,037 yards and 101 touchdowns.

Dorien Bryant – The speedy wide receiver set 10 records during his Boilermaker days, most

notably 6,219 all-purpose yards. He caught 292 passes for 3,548 yards and is among Purdue's all-time greats with 2,125 kickoff return yards.

Dustin Keller – The last member of Purdue's 2003 recruiting class, the Lafayette Jeff standout molded himself into an NFL first-round draft pick at tight end. Once bound for Toledo before accepting a scholarship offer from Joe Tiller, Keller was Purdue's team MVP in 2007. His career numbers include 135 receptions for 1,732 yards and 15 touchdowns.

Anthony Spencer – The defensive end from Fort Wayne led the nation as a senior with 26.5 tackles for loss. Spencer had 21 career sacks and was a first-round draft pick by the Dallas Cowboys in 2007.

Kory Sheets – The running back found the end zone often during his career, setting school records for career rushing touchdowns (58), total touchdowns (54) and rushing touchdowns in a season (16). Sheets became the sixth Boilermaker to rush for 1,000 yards, piling up 1,131 as a senior in 2008. His 3,341 career rushing yards are second to Mike Alstott.

Noteworthy
Purdue safety Dillon Thieneman earned his first Freshman All-American honor late last week from The Athletic. Thieneman and Michigan State punter Ryan Eckley were the only Big Ten Conference players selected to The Athletic's first team.

The Big Ten's Freshman of the Year was a three-star recruit from Westfield, Ind., who started right away and put up big numbers," The Athletic stated. "Thieneman ... finished fifth in the conference in tackles with 106 and tied for second nationally in interceptions with six. His 74 solo tackles broke a Purdue freshman record previously held by Rod Woodson." ... Purdue sophomore point guard Braden Smith scored a career-high 27 points in the fourth-ranked Boilermakers' 92-86 victory against Alabama in Toronto on Dec. 9. Zach Edey and Smith combined for 62 points, the most by a Purdue duo since Glenn Robinson (44) and Cuonzo Martin (29) combined for 73 points against Kansas in the 1994 NCAA tournament. Staking an early claim for All-Big Ten honors, Smith is averaging 13.2 points, 7.2 assists and 5.9 rebounds while shooting 45.5 percent from 3-point range (15 of 33). Edey passed Robbie Hummel for 10th place on Purdue's career scoring list. With 1,781 points, next up for Edey is Walter Jordan at 1,813 points.

- Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.

Thank
you
for
subscribing!

About that 'clear path' in the Ukraine war



BRIAN HOWEY Columnist

INDIANAPOLIS – Two years after the American Continental Congress had declared independence, George Washington's army settled in for its third bitterly cold winter encampment at Valley Forge. Things looked bleak in 1778. In 1863, two years after the Civil War began, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee disheartened the Union army with a spectacular victory at Chancellorsville, Virginia. A few days later more than 100 people were killed during anti-war riots in New York City. And in World War II, it wouldn't be until May 1943 that the allies turned the tide against Nazi Germany in North Africa. The Soviets defeated the Nazis at

Stalingrad as winter began. It would be another six months before American, British and Canadian soldiers stormed the beaches at Normandy, breaching Hitler's Fortress Europe. It would take U.S. victories in previously obscure places such as Monmouth, N.J., Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Normandy that the tides of great wars shifted; that ultimate victory could even be fathomed. It's been a little less than two years since Russian tyrant Vladimir Putin made the unilateral decision to invade Ukraine, unleashing his genocidal armies to bomb civilian targets, power plants during the long winters, and commit wave after wave of atrocities using rape, drones and missiles against apartment buildings, schools, churches and hospitals. In doing so, U.S. intelligence estimates are that Russia has lost 87% of its invasion force and two thirds of its tanks. Now further U.S. funding for Ukraine is being held up in Congress, with Republicans insisting that \$111 billion the Biden administration has requested for Ukraine and Israel also including

funding to "fix" the porous southern border. "We stand at a real inflection point in history," President Biden said with Zelenskyy at his side at the White House on Tuesday. Failing to approve more aid would give Putin, "the greatest Christmas gift they could possibly give him." While the new Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson said, "We stand with him against Putin's brutal invasion," he accused the White House of failing to articulate a "clear path" to Ukraine's victory. Zelenskyy reportedly spoke to U.S. senators entirely in English, with one GOP senator telling PBS reporter Lisa Desjardins the gesture was "poignant." Desjardins writes that there were a few times Zelenskyy had to look up definitions of words used by senators. "One word he didn't know: Stalemate." But that is where Zelenskyy and Ukraine find themselves after two years of war. "The U.S. assesses that Russia believes it is helped by a military stalemate with

Ukraine that saps Western support for Kyiv, making its war easier to win," Politico reported of a U.S. intelligence assessment. A new Pew Research Center survey (Nov. 27 to Dec. 3, 2023, among 5,203 members of the Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel), finds that: 48% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say the U.S. is giving too much aid to Ukraine, while about half say that the U.S. is providing the right amount of support (29%) or not providing enough (18%). In December 2022, Zelenskyy described the states at a joint session of Congress as a hero. "It will define whether it will be a democracy of Ukrainians and for Americans – for all," he said. "This battle cannot be frozen or postponed. It cannot be ignored. There is a lot to unpack here. First, there is a crying – no, screaming – need to address the U.S.-Mexican border. There hasn't been comprehensive immigration reform since President Reagan

was in office. It needs to be bipartisan. It needs to be comprehensive. To suggest that this can be done on the fly and within days while Ukraine and Israel writhe in crisis, is not good governance. Second, it is nearly impossible to articulate a "clear path to victory" at the two-year mark. Gen. Washington couldn't do it in 1778, President Lincoln and Gen. U.S. Grant couldn't in July 1863, and President Roosevelt and Gen. Eisenhower were unable to fathom how long it would take Berlin and Tokyo to fall in early 1943. Third, Ukraine cannot defeat Russia without air power, just as the U.S. wouldn't have won D-Day or the Battle of the Bulge without it. "Who controls the skies controls the war's duration," Zelenskyy said at a press conference. Johnson said in a letter to President Biden last week, "President Biden must satisfy congressional oversight inquiries about the administration's failure thus far to present clearly defined objectives and its failure

to provide essential weapons on a timely basis." Providing "essential weapons" on a "timely basis" is the path toward "clearly defined objectives." Everyone involved from Kyiv to Washington to Brussels must up their game. Fourth, if we abandon Zelenskyy and Ukraine to Putin, it will be just a matter of years until NATO and the U.S. will be spending blood and treasure to fend off Putin's expansion. These are lessons to be learned after his repeated incursions into Georgia, Chechnya, Crimea and now Ukraine over the past two decades. Finally, U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz has faded as an advocate for her homeland. She was hyper-involved for the first few months after the invasion, before tangling with Zelenskyy's chief of staff. She subsequently announced she wouldn't seek reelection in 2024, essentially becoming a lame duck at the very time House Republican support for Ukraine began to evaporate.

Brian Howey is senior writer and columnist for [Howey Politics Indiana/State Affairs](#). Find Howey on Facebook and Twitter @[hwypol](#).

INDOT Receives Funds to Explore Expansion of Passenger Rail in Indiana

Indianapolis - Chicago Corridor selected through FRA's Corridor ID Program

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced Friday that the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) will receive up to \$500,000 to support the assessment and potential development of the Indianapolis - Chicago passenger rail corridor through the [Corridor Identification and Development \(Corridor ID\) Program](#). "This is a first step toward expanding passenger rail in Indiana," said INDOT Commissioner Mike Smith. "Receiving this funding allows us to gather essential information to make more informed decisions going forward." INDOT put forth its application in the spring. The federal funds will go toward preliminary work in preparation for a Service Development Plan. The plan would be comprehensive in nature and include information about necessary track

improvements and facilities, operating costs, ridership statistics and state support that would be necessary to begin sustainable service. There are no state matching funds required for this stage of the program. Other corridors selected for Corridor ID funding in Indiana include:

- Chicago - Fort Wayne - Columbus - Pittsburgh (Midwest Connect Corridor), applied for by the City of Fort Wayne
- Louisville - Indianapolis, applied for by the Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency (KIPDA)
- Daily service on the Cardinal long distance route, applied for by Amtrak

The Corridor ID Program is a comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development

program that will help guide intercity passenger rail development throughout the country and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation. Stay Informed Get updates on INDOT projects and programs via:

- Facebook: facebook.com/indianadepartmentoftransportation
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- Mobile App: iTunes App Store and the Google Play store for Android

About the Indiana Department of Transportation INDOT continues to solidify the Hoosier State as the Crossroads of America by implementing Gov. Eric J. Holcomb's \$30 billion Next Level Roads plan. With six district offices and 3,500 employees, the agency is responsible for constructing and maintaining more than 29,000 lane miles of highways, more than 5,700 bridges, and supporting 4,500 rail miles and 127 aviation facilities across the state. INDOT was recently ranked #1 in the United States for infrastructure in CNBC's 2022 "America's Top States for Business" ranking. Learn more about INDOT at in.gov/indot.

Braun Wants Truth on Biden

Hoosier Senator and gubernatorial candidate Mike Braun released the following statement on the House of Representatives' vote to formalize the impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, which will grant the House the ability to better enforce subpoenas. "An impeachment inquiry is the only way we're going to get to the truth. Hunter Biden was selling influence abroad for millions and Joe Biden was 'the brand,' as Hunter's business partner Devon Archer testified. As Vice President, Joe Biden spoke with Hunter's business associates over 20 times and used a fake email address to receive and send emails from his son's associates and to notify Hunter Biden when he would be calling the Ukrainian president. These facts must be followed, but President Biden's politicized DOJ and the White House have stonewalled at every turn. The House should vote to begin an impeachment inquiry; it's the only way to follow the facts - and the money - where they lead."

THEFT

From Page A1

check with your neighbors and see if the delivery service may have dropped off your package at the wrong address. Many delivery companies will take pictures of your package in the designated location - be sure to check for the photo and verify it is at the right spot. **Don't leave unattended packages.** When possible, do not leave delivered packages unattended for long periods. If you are expecting a package, attempt to schedule its delivery when you know you will be home. Ask your neighbors if they mind holding on to packages delivered if you plan to be gone for an extended time. **Ship to store.** If purchasing an item from a retailer with a physical location near your home, consider shipping it there instead. Retailers will require proof of purchase or identification before releasing packages they have received, and this is a sure way to avoid porch pirates. **Use a security camera.** Installing a [home security system](#) with cameras or a [camera-enabled doorbell](#) is a great way to deter package theft, especially when highly visible. Consider including a sign that specifically states that the residence is under surveillance. Even if a package is stolen from your porch, the video evidence will help law enforcement track down the thieves (but be wary of the risk of [internet-connected devices](#) and research before you purchase). **Require a signature.** Many delivery companies

include the option to require a signature before leaving a package, letting you take physical possession of the item as soon as it is delivered. While this option works well for those often at home, especially for expensive items, it may create difficulties in receiving packages if your schedule and the delivery service differ. Be sure to check with the delivery company on their policy for packages that are not signed for; they may return it to the sender after a certain number of attempts. **Consider a package receiving service.** Some major retailers, such as Amazon, offer secure package-receiving locations away from your home that you can access with a key or code. Some independent businesses also specialize in this service, allowing you to designate a different delivery location for your packages and the ability to pick them up on your way home. If you fear your package being stolen, file a report with your local police department and the delivery company. Depending on your delivery service, they may offer insurance or other policies to reimburse you for your losses. For more information and to learn how to protect yourself, Google "BBB 10 Steps to Avoid Scams". If you spot a scam, whether you have lost money or not, report it to BBB's Scam Tracker at BBB.org/ScamTracker and the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov. Your story can help protect consumers from similar scams.

Men, Ready to Try Baseball . . . Again?

Attention, baseballers! If you played baseball as a kid or in school and miss it, A League of Our Own Independent Baseball League is looking for baseball players who are searching for the opportunity to continue pursuing their dream of playing baseball.

On Jan. 30, 2024 there will be a statewide tryout at the Mojo-Up Sports indoor Complex in Noblesville. This is open to local, national and international baseball players ages 19 years old and older (unlimited age).

The season will start Labor Day weekend Aug. 31, 2024 through Oct. 19, 2024. Anyone interested should visit www.aleagueofourown247.com/ or call (205) 264-1468.

SHARPS

From Page A1

disposal rules wherever they are. An option like SafetyIsThePoint.org helps people learn how to safely discard their used sharps and find disposal locations across the United States. People who use sharps can often dispose of them at home or on the road. It's as simple as 1-2-3:

1. Place used sharps in a strong, plastic container like a laundry detergent or bleach bottle.
2. When the container is 75% full, seal it tightly with duct tape and label it "do not recycle."
3. Place the sealed container in regular household trash.

family members and friends ahead of travel, so they know what to expect. Learn more about the rules of safe sharps disposal this holiday season at SafetyIsThePoint.org.

Commonly Used Medical Sharps

- Needles - fine, slender, hollow pieces of metal, typically attached to syringes, used to inject medication under the skin or withdraw fluid from the body
- Lancets, also called "fingersticks" - often used by people with diabetes to get drops of blood for testing

- Auto injectors, including epinephrine pens - syringes pre-filled with fluid
- Auto injectors, including epinephrine pens - syringes pre-filled with fluid medication designed to be self-injected into the body
- Infusion sets - tubing systems with needles used to deliver drugs to the body
- Connection needles - needles that connect to a tube used to transfer fluids in and out of the body designed to be self-injected into the body

RUSTY

From Page A1

The personal benefit you are entitled to at your FRA must be less than 50% of your ex-husband's FRA entitlement. If the above are true, when you claim your own SS retirement benefit you will also get a "spousal boost" to bring your payment up to what you're entitled to as an ex-spouse. The amount of the spousal boost, if you claim Social Security at your FRA, will be the difference between half of his FRA entitlement and your FRA entitlement. If you claim your benefit before your FRA, not only will your own benefit be reduced for claiming early, but the amount of your spousal boost will also be reduced (benefits claimed before FRA are always reduced). Whenever you decide to claim Social Security, you will be automatically deemed to be filing for benefits from your ex-husband as well (you shouldn't need to apply separately). You've already satisfied the basic criteria of at least 10 years married to get benefits from an ex-spouse and, if you satisfy the above criteria as well, you will be entitled to a spousal boost when you

claim. But your current earnings from working full time will likely affect your eligibility to collect Social Security benefits at this time, so waiting until your full retirement age to claim may be your best choice. If you will only slightly exceed the annual earnings limit you can consider claiming earlier, as long as you are comfortable with receiving a permanently reduced amount, and the prospect of not getting benefits for a number of months if you exceed the earnings limit (the number of months you will go without benefits depends on how much you exceed the limit by).

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadviser@amacfoundation.org.

Disposal rules are different in every state, so it's important to confirm local disposal regulations. To help travelers comply with local regulations, SafetyIsThePoint.org includes a clickable map and ZIP code finder that explains disposal rules by location, as some states legally prohibit disposing of sharps in the trash or recycling containers and require sharps to be transported to a collection center in an approved sharps container. Free printable resources and a step-by-step guide for at-home sharps disposal are available on the website for sharps users, health care providers, patient educators and advocates. The resources can also be downloaded and sent to

Katy Gentry Celebrate Holidays in Carmel



BROADWAY

in your backyard!

Artistic Support Provided by **Christel DeHaan**

The [Actors Theatre of Indiana](#) is excited to announce that Katy Gentry will be a special guest for ATI's CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS. Gentry promises three nights of unforgettable performances as she joins ATI tonight through Sunday at The Studio Theater in Carmel. Known for her portrayal and celebration of the Judy Garland Songbook, ATI audiences first saw Katy when she originated the role of Young Judy Garland in ATI's production of *Beyond the Rainbow*. Performing on the professional stage for nearly 30 years, Gentry's credits include everything from the world premiere of the

Johnny Cash musical *Ring of Fire*, Yuletide with The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, *Feinstein's*, to Carnegie Hall. Joining Gentry will be Indiana's own Piano Man, Eric Baker. From the Jazz Kitchen to his sellout Billy Joel tributes at *Feinstein's*, Baker will be leading an all-star jazz trio with Greg Wolff on drums

and Christian Starnes on bass. Make plans now to serenade in the joy of the holidays with Gentry's golden voice. Audiences will hear the Christmas classics infused with contemporary and religious favorites of Gentry's own. With her signature storytelling flavor, come and gather

around the piano for a beautiful evening of music you do not want to miss. Friday and Saturday shows begin at 7:30 pm, Sunday at 2 pm. Get your tickets at [atistage.org](#) or by calling The Center for the Performing Arts box office at **(317) 843-3800**.



David Commanday New Music Director for Carmel Symphony Orchestra

The Carmel Symphony Orchestra announced the hire of David Commanday as Music Director of the CSO. A brilliant leader, Maestro Commanday immediately captured the hearts of Carmel Symphony Orchestra audiences and musicians while conducting the early concerts of the season. Commanday serves as CSO Music Director immediately. His initial appointment continues through the 2024-2025 season. "We are extremely honored and pleased to have made this

appointment. The musicians of the CSO fell in love with Maestro Commanday at their first rehearsal, and the results of this positive engagement have resonated at our Palladium performances. Audiences are responding, and we can't wait to see how the Carmel Symphony Orchestra evolves under Maestro's Commanday's leadership.", said Executive Director, Anne Marie Chastain. Commanday's career has brought renown on three continents. Lauded as a remarkable conductor

with the ability to make his musicians soar through his soul and risk taking, his performances have been recognized for their "effervescent brilliance and intelligent creativity." (Neue Zeit, Berlin, Germany) Commanday currently serves as Artistic Director/Conductor of the Heartland Festival Orchestra (HFO), an innovative ensemble now celebrating its 15th season, as well as Director of Orchestral Activities and Instructor of Cello at Eastern Illinois University.

"I am deeply honored by this appointment and the opportunity to work with the wonderful musicians of the CSO in the seasons ahead. Carmel has a treasure in this orchestra, and in the Palladium, the truly world-class concert hall that is their home," Commanday said. "I can't wait to get to work!"

Thank you for subscribing!

Home Sales Dipped in November

Indiana home sales finished 8 percent below 2022 in November with 5,870 closings; this year-over-year gap tightened into single digits for the first time since March. Monthly pending sales dropped just 1 percent behind last year (5,375 versus 5,440 in '22) as falling mortgage rates and more homes for sale helped stabilize statewide sales, according to data released by the Indiana Association of Realtors. Indiana's median sale price remained consistent from October to November at \$240,000, 3 percent above 2022 but down more than 6 percent from this year's mid-summer peak of nearly \$257,000. Homes sold in just over two weeks (15 days from listings to pending) for 95.4 percent of their original listing price. 6,657 new listings were added to Indiana MLSs in November, also 3 percent ahead of 2022. Total inventory

also rose for a seventh straight month, with 13,241 homes available as a daily average through November. "November is typically a slow month for real estate and these numbers are consistent with this year's market," said Lynn Wheeler, IAR president for 2023. "Mortgage rates and home prices are higher today than they were last autumn – but sales were falling faster to close out 2022 as homebuyers were reeling from rates that had doubled in just ten months." But with the thirty-year rate falling nearly a full percentage point in the last six weeks, Wheeler is optimistic about a buyer rally to start 2024. "We got off to a strong start in the first quarter of 2023 because rates had dropped and the inventory of homes for sale had grown," she explained. "We're seeing the same trends today." But Wheeler added that 2023 saw a "roller coaster" of mortgage rates rising and falling nearly two percentage points through the year,

stifling the rebound as rates increased and inventory tightened in March. "Most buyers are also sellers, and the up-and-down climate caused many homeowners to put off any plans to move this year," she finished. "2024 can be different if there's more confidence in rates continuing to improve and more listings hit the market to meet demand."

- November's 5,870 closed sales bring the 2023 year-to-date total to 70,786, 14 percent below 2022.
- Year-to-date listings grew to 86,374 with 6,547 homes newly listed in November, 12 percent below the first eleven months of 2022.
- Listings fell sharply from October to November (-18 percent), while closed sales dropped 8 percent month over month – within seasonal expectations.
- Year-over-year sales continued to hold up better in rural counties (+1 percent vs. November '22) with a more

- affordable median sale price (\$176,000), compared to the state and suburban counties (-11 percent) – with Boone County (+28 percent) as a notable suburban exception.
- Urban core counties (-12 percent) fell short of the statewide trend, including Marion (-10 percent with 899 closings in November).
- In addition to Marion, other counties with at least 250 sales included Allen (359 closings, down 18 percent year-over-year), Hamilton (411 sales, -16 percent), Lake (386, -16 percent) and St. Joseph (254, virtually unchanged from last November's 255 closings).
- Among Indiana's largest metropolitan regions, only Evansville outpaced the state sales trend: Indianapolis-Carmel (-11 percent), Fort Wayne (-17 percent), Evansville (-7 percent).

The MIBOR REALTOR® Association region saw sales fall 11 percent behind November 2022 with 2,223 closings at a median sale price of \$292,000 (+5 percent above 2022).

Salvation Army Begins Annual Distribution

The Salvation Army of Central Indiana kicked off its annual Angel Tree Toy Shop distribution this week. The five-day distribution will end on Dec. 19 at three locations in Hamilton and Marion counties. The program serves 5,000 children from Central Indiana whose families are in need of a little extra help this Christmas.

A new addition to the traditional Angel Tree program this year is the opportunity for parents and guardians to shop for gifts through a "Toy Shop" at each distribution location. After shopping from thousands of donated toys and choosing the perfect gifts for each child, parents are able to take the presents home, wrap them, and give them to their children on Christmas morning. Each Angel participating in the program will also receive a package of socks, underwear, and a Bible.

"Shifting to this model allows us more time with families so that we can have a deeper impact and provide more care," said Major Rachel Stouder, Central Indiana Area Commander. "This gives parents more control over and choice of what they are giving to their children. Data is showing that the impact of continuing to provide choices and an opportunity for greater participation on the part of the parents is not only noticed in increased dignity but there's also a higher volume of families who are happy to be a part of other caring programs." Parents and guardians will shop for their

children at a designated location. Each site is equipped with thousands of toys from which they can shop.

- The Salvation Army Fountain Square Corps Community Center, 1337 Shelby St., Indianapolis: December 14, 15, 18, and 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- The Salvation Army Eagle Creek Corps Community Center, 4400 N. High School Rd., Indianapolis: December 14, 15, and 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Carmel United Methodist Church, 621 S. Rangeline Rd., Carmel: December 16 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Many local families and companies sponsored Angels in 2024, including Mavpak, Bastian Solution, and Flexware Innovation. The Indiana Pacers also donated hundreds of toys to ensure that every child is able to receive a toy through the Angel Tree Toy Shop. This year's 19th Annual Circle City Toy Run provided several truckloads of toys to give parents plenty of options when shopping for their children.

Volunteers have been invaluable through this months-long process and in recent weeks have helped to sort and conduct quality checks of each donation. Volunteers are still needed for several of the upcoming distribution days. To learn more or sign up, visit [SACentralIndiana.org/AngelTreeToyShop](#).

Fire investigators Want Help

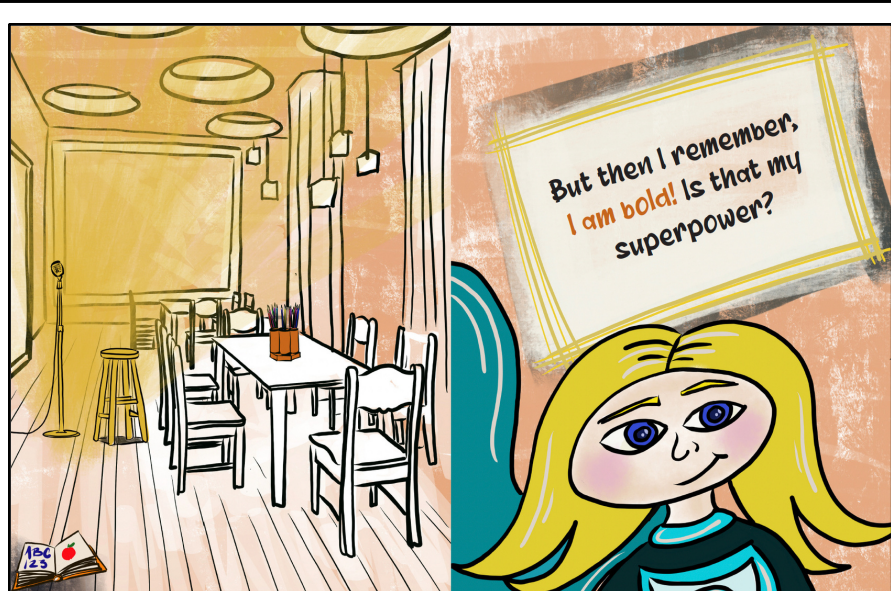
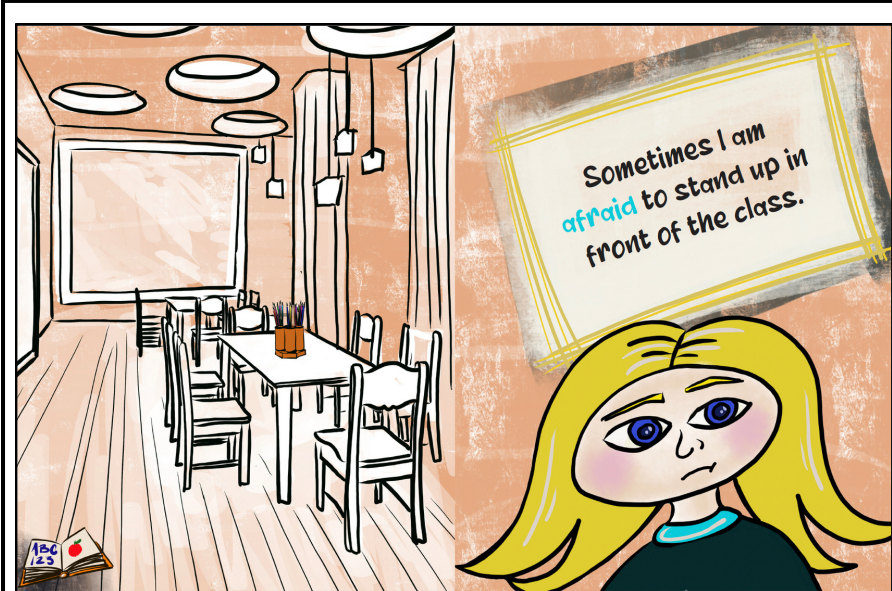
Indiana State Fire Marshal investigators seek information from the public about any suspicious activity near the Rod & Gun Steakhouse in Rosedale, Ind., which was destroyed by a Monday evening fire. The historic eatery near the Wabash River west of Rosedale was once known as a hideaway for gangsters and politicians during the Prohibition Era. The fire resulted in a near-total loss for the current owner, who noted a significant amount of memorabilia was lost during the fire. The original club burned in 1970 and a new building was built on the same site. The Otter Creek Fire Department arrived on the scene at 2525 E. Lambert Ave. just after 10 p.m. Monday

to find flames coming through the roof of the building. The fire grew so large that more than a dozen departments responded. Fire investigators reported the current owner called 911 after noticing the fire from an upstairs apartment in the building. The fire patterns indicate the fire likely started in a van adjacent to the house, although the actual cause of the fire remains under investigation. Due to the somewhat remote location of the business, investigators are hopeful somebody may have witnessed activity in the area while driving by. Anyone with information is asked to call the Indiana Arson hotline at 1-800-382-4628.

www.thetimes
24-7.com

BETSY

From Page A1



Photos courtesy of Sarah Ackermann

Noblesville children's author Sarah Ackermann created the artwork for her book.

where she and her husband lived before relocating to Illinois before moving to their current home in Indiana. "My first-grade students at the time were so wonderful and actually inspired many of the characters in the book," Ackermann said. "One of their favorite lesson plans I did with them involved creating their own superhero characters. My first-graders immediately latched on to that theme, and I ended up writing a month-long superhero-themed curriculum for them to keep the momentum going." She wrote the book inspired "by their unwavering fear to create absolutely anything their mind came up with," Ackermann said. "In many ways, I looked up to my young students. They were so much braver and quicker to take risks than me. This book was for them." When Ackermann began the process of brainstorming, she thought about her potential audience which, of course, were her first-graders, but also she thought of her future daughter. "We were working on a

family at the time. I wanted the words in the book to be simple, accessible, and motivational," she said. The book's text features "different characters admitting their fears and then conquering them with their amazing super characteristics." Once she wrote the book's text, she started drawing. Ackermann loves to draw on her Apple iPad with her Apple Pencil, in a program called Procreate. "What I appreciate about this is that I can take creative risks with my sketches and never run out of materials. I can easily go back a few steps with a few clicks of a button if I don't like something. And I can make endless versions. I created two versions of each character first. One as their day-to-day selves. One as their super selves with cape and costume. I wanted the characters featured to represent a variety of genders and skin tones." Then she worked on the spreads, and the different scenes the characters associated with their fears. "I used a subtractive process in which I would cover the

spread with color in Procreate, and then use the eraser tool to make the primary marks. I then incorporated objects that I felt represented each character's fears in the imagery. One spread features a little blonde superhero. That character is me. The background is a classroom. The symbolic object is a microphone, representing how I conquered my fear of speaking in front of groups." She is inspired by the young people in her life. "Children are so brave, so authentic. As we age, we lose a little bit of that in ourselves. I wish we could retain more of that fun-loving, risk-taking version of ourselves." Having a child, she sees more. "Now that I have a daughter of my own, I see firsthand how she is exploring the world with awe and enthusiasm. I hope that this book can help young ones, like my daughter, keep some of that adventurous spirit over time. I also thought about all the amazing art teachers I've worked with and encountered over the years while working on this book. Art teachers, themselves,

are superheroes. Who else do you know that can entice the attention of a packed classroom of students, while also ensuring their meaningful artistic growth. Art teachers rock! This book is also a testament to them and the incredibly hard work that goes into leading classrooms of students day in and day out in amazing ways, she said. This is a 'little' different than other pay-your-ages we have done," Ackermann said. There is limited season, and we have limited seating, it is a timed event, and everyone including adults is painting. The max for the piece is \$10, so anyone over 9 is only paying \$10. Everyone intending to attend the story time must have a ticket. This will sell out; we do not anticipate having last minute space." Ackermann was born in Arvada, Colo., and grew up in Joliet, graduating high school in 2001. From there, she went to University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Ill., where she double majored in art education and photography, and stayed an extra year to earn her master's degree in art

education. After that, she nailed her first job teaching high school photography in Streamwood, Ill. After four years of teaching, she went back to school to earn her doctorate in curriculum and instruction from the University of Missouri in St. Louis. After gathering all of the data for my dissertation (which was focused on young children and how they draw on a tablet computer) She finished her doctorate in Zurich while teaching at international schools. When they decided to return home to the states, she took a job as a chief academic officer with the Art of Education University, an institution dedicated to providing meaningful masters degrees to practicing art educators. She's currently executive director for Teaching Innovation at Ball State University, where she works with a team of faculty development specialists, instructional consultants, and multimedia designers to support faculty across campus in all ways. And just because she doesn't teach youth, she's still very creative in her daily job by designing learning experiences for faculty. "That said, writing and illustrating this book was

a great release for me personally and professionally," Ackermann said. She also just illustrated a book written by her sister, Angela Tiedemann, titled, "13 Spooky Tales: A Book of Children's Poems," which was launched before Halloween and is a fun read for the littles, too, she said. When Ackermann was in college, she double-majored in art education and photography, so whenever she gets the chance, she loves to shoot imagery. "Time is sometimes an issue though, so when I'm not creating my own artwork, I'm now creating artwork with my daughter. She loves to draw and paint." So what's it like to see your book in print? Seeing my book in print has been exhilarating. I had the incredible honor of going back to my schools in Switzerland to gift copies of the book to the school libraries there, and one of the students present at the time said, "Wow! It's a real book!" Indeed it is, and I hope that it continues to inspire little superheroes for years to come. While my current job is pretty broad in that I support all faculty at Ball State University, I love to give back to my art education friends as much as possible. She serves as Director-Elect of the Supervision and Administration Division of the National Art Education Association, and has published quite a few articles in the art education field featuring insights about contemporary artists, art and technology and more.

-Betsy Reason writes about people, places and things in Hamilton County. Contact The Times Editor Betsy Reason at betsy@thetimes24-7.com

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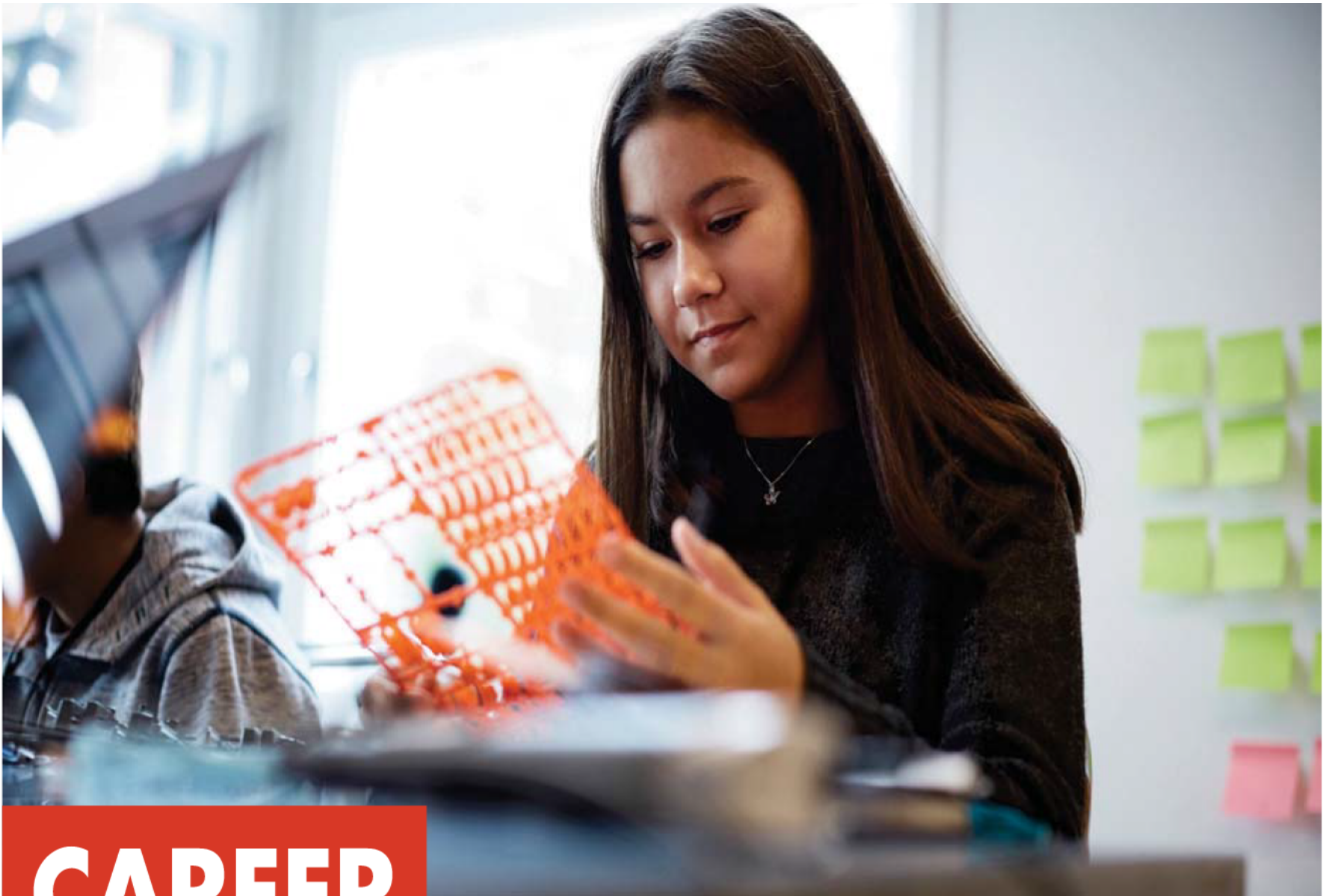
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Photos courtesy of Getty Images

CAREER READY

3 strategies to prepare teens for life after school

FAMILY FEATURES

For some time, heading to college or joining the workforce have been the standard choices for teens upon high school graduation. Today, in part due to technology and social media, students have access to myriad career paths that are all but traditional.

With an increasingly dynamic career landscape creating an awareness of jobs that didn't exist even 10 years ago and a shortage in the workforce, there's a willingness for both potential employees and employers to look at careers and young talent from a whole new perspective.

"There isn't a 'typical' career anymore," said Dr. Lorna Bryant, Gen Z career expert and head of career education for Pearson Virtual Schools. "With the perfect storm in the workforce of boomers retiring, many people still not returning to work in the wake of the pandemic and a population that has declined for the last 50 years, this generation (ages 11-26) is positioned extremely well. Employers want and need them. In short, the scales have flipped to the supply side and demand is causing many employers to remove barriers to work entry. Whether high school grads go to college or work, developing in-demand skills early will help them secure and succeed in the jobs of the future."

Consider these tips from Bryant to help students explore the many options in front of them and prepare for the possibilities that await after high school.

Help Kids Cultivate Durable Skills

While technology has transformed the world of work, an increasing number of careers prioritize durable skills over technical or hard skills. Durable skills (also known as "soft" or "human" skills) include collaboration, leadership, communication and attention to detail, along with traits like empathy, grit and resilience. According to Pearson's Power Skills report, these are some of the most in-demand skills for employers. In addition, research from America Succeeds found employers seek durable skills 3.8 times more frequently than the top five technical or hard skills in every location, industry sector and educational attainment level. Possessing these skills is not only attractive to employers but colleges and universities, too. One of the best ways to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, which don't exist today, is to focus on timeless durable skills.

Many students already possess or are actively developing these skills in high school. The key is to raise awareness of their importance, seek ways to boost them and showcase them on college and job applications or resumes. For example, teens can display their leadership skills by captaining sports teams or starting a club at school. They can showcase collaboration and communication abilities by holding and thriving in student government positions, volunteering or working part-time jobs.

Bridge Passions and Hobbies to Careers

Beginning conversations with children as early as middle school that expose students to job roles, responsibilities and salaries connected to areas of interest is important for setting them up for long-term success. Nurturing interests – rather than dismissing them as flights of fancy – and finding paths to explore that align with those hobbies or interests in real-world applications can open doors to potential careers that may not have previously been considered.

For example, Lake Liao, a 2023 Lighthouse Connections Academy grad, is attending Princeton University on a pre-law track. The flexibility of online school enabled him to dig into his passions for political and community organizing and activism in high school, including activism around climate and environmental policy. It was through joining local nurses in their fight for a fair contract he realized he wanted to be a lawyer and make a difference in the labor rights cause.



To help students align their values and interests with potential careers, ask questions such as:

- What is it, specifically, you enjoy about your interests? What jobs rely on related skills (working with your hands, serving others, being creative, etc.)?
- Do you have the skills to do those jobs? If not, what research and training do you need to acquire the necessary skillset?
- Are there related jobs available in the geographic location you want to live?
- Can you make enough money to live the lifestyle you want doing this job?
- Can you envision enjoying this type of work for 8 (or more) hours per day?

Get a Head Start on Credentials or College Credit

As earning college credits, career-ready credentials and specialized training for future careers is becoming more accessible for high school and middle school students, it's important to research available options. From online resources, workshops, career counselors and accelerated career readiness programs that allow students to enter college or the workforce "job-ready," there are more options available now than ever before.

One example, Connections Academy, a K-12 online school program, has expanded its slate of college and career readiness initiatives for middle and high school

students to offer an innovative tri-credit approach where courses can deliver high school credit; industry-recognized micro-credentials (to help qualify for careers in data analytics, UX design, software development, cybersecurity and more); and eligibility for college credit toward more than 150 bachelor's degree programs at partner universities in the United States. In addition, the Career Pathways program delivers curated learning experiences in fields such as IT, business and health care, allowing students to connect with employers, internships and clubs, and take advantage of specialized classes that transition seamlessly to higher education or nationally recognized, industry certifications.

Taking advantage of program offerings, aspiring paramedic Maeson Frymire, a 2022 Inspire Connections Academy graduate, became certified as an EMT before graduating high school. After graduation, he became a firefighter and is now working toward becoming an advanced certified EMT, carving out a career path toward flight paramedicine.

Or consider Abigail Sanders, also a 2022 graduate, who completed her bachelor's degree by the time she graduated high school. Now in the second year of her doctorate program in medical school, she aspires to be a doctor by the age of 22 and uses her love of learning and passion for science to advance her career while seeking to become an oncologist.

For more information on online schools and career readiness programs for teens, visit ConnectionsAcademy.com.

WEEKEND

In The
Kitchen

Cooking Clean

A reliable energy source can make cooking nutritious meals quick and easy



Chef Dean Sheremet

FAMILY FEATURES

With many people focused on achieving a cleaner and healthier lifestyle, taking actionable steps such as recycling, using less hot water and eating nutritious foods can help lower your carbon footprint. Another step for a clean lifestyle: cooking with an environmentally friendly, clean energy source like propane.

Propane is already powering more than 12 million homes with reliable energy people can count on. Plus, gas-powered cooktops are preferred by 96% of professional chefs, including nutritionist and chef Dean Sheremet of "My Kitchen Rules," who partnered with the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) to educate homeowners on the benefits of cooking with gas. "There is a lot of misinformation about cooking with gas in the news," Sheremet said. "It's important to remember, the act of cooking itself impacts indoor air quality, regardless of the energy that powers the stove. Having a qualified technician install and perform regular service for the stove, maintaining proper ventilation using a hood or opening doors or windows and following common sense safety measures can ensure the safe use of any stove."

Because ventilation when cooking is key, it's important to note that cooking with propane results in lower carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions than electric cooking, on average. That's because more than 60% of electricity production comes from natural gas or coal generation plants, which release more CO2 emissions as part of the generation process.

Beyond the environmental benefits, propane-powered cooking appliances provide convenience, modern design and performance in kitchens, allowing home chefs to prepare healthy meals for their families in a short amount of time. Sheremet values the efficiency of a propane cooktop when creating nutritious meals like Skirt Steak with Salsa Verde and Spaghetti and Clams, which can be whipped up in minutes using a clean energy source. "Chefs, and parents like me, prefer gas for a variety of reasons," Sheremet said. "My son, Atlas, is often in the kitchen when I'm cooking, and we know sometimes kids don't listen when we tell them to not touch a pan or the stove. Propane cooktops allow for greater control of heat levels and their instant flame turnoff capabilities help them cool faster than traditional electric stoves, which can remain dangerously hot for a period after they have been turned off."

Learn more about cooking with propane and find recipes from Sheremet at Propane.com/ChefDean.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF COOKING WITH GAS

Cooking with a reliable and environmentally clean energy source like propane can take your home chef skills to the next level. However, there are steps to take to ensure safety while maximizing the benefits of cooking with your gas range.

Do:

- Follow the manufacturer's installation and operating instructions.
- Keep pot handles turned inward to protect against accidents like knocking the pot off the stove or little ones reaching for the handles.
- Keep the range surface clean.
- Keep flammable materials away from burner flames.

Don't:

- Do not cover the oven bottom with foil as it can restrict air circulation.
- Never use gas ranges for space heating.
- Do not allow children to turn burner control knobs.
- Do not leave food unattended on the cooktop.



Spaghetti and Clams

Spaghetti and Clams

Recipe courtesy of chef Dean Sheremet on behalf of PERC

Salt

- 8-12 littleneck or other small clams in shell, scrubbed
- 1/4 pound spaghetti noodles
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/2-1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/2 dried red chile pepper
- 1/3 cup vermouth or white wine
- 1-2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

Bring large pot of lightly salted water to boil. Soak clams in cold water.

Add spaghetti to boiling water and cook until slightly underdone. In large saucpan over medium-low heat, add olive oil, garlic and chile pepper. Saute gently, reducing heat, if necessary, so garlic does not brown.

Add vermouth and clams; cover. Clams should open in about 2 minutes. Add hot drained pasta, cover and shake pot gently. Simmer 1-2 minutes until spaghetti is cooked to taste.

Discard unopened clams. Add half the parsley and shake pan to distribute evenly. Transfer to plate or bowl and sprinkle with remaining parsley.

Skirt Steak with Salsa Verde

Recipe courtesy of chef Dean Sheremet on behalf of PERC

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 thinly sliced scallions
- 3 tablespoons capers, drained and roughly chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, plus additional, to taste, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, plus additional, to taste, divided
- 1 1/2 pounds skirt steak
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint, divided
- 1/4 cup pistachios
- 1 romaine heart
- 1 radicchio
- 1/2 cup crumbled goat cheese

Whisk olive oil, vinegar, scallions, capers, garlic, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Pour about 1/3 of dressing (about 1/3 cup) over steak and turn to coat.

Add parsley and 1 tablespoon mint to reserved dressing; stir and set aside until ready to use. Cover and refrigerate steak 30 minutes, or up to 24 hours.

In small saute pan over medium heat, toast pistachios, tossing often, until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Set aside.

Set grill to medium-high heat or heat grill pan on stovetop over medium-high heat. Grill steak about 5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate and rest 10 minutes.

Cut romaine hearts lengthwise into quarters. Arrange romaine and radicchio in layers on large platter, leaving room on one side for steak. Sprinkle with goat cheese, pistachios and remaining mint.

Slice steak into 3-inch pieces then slice against grain to cut steak into wide strips. Add sliced steak to platter. Drizzle reserved dressing on romaine and steak.



Skirt Steak with Salsa Verde